

# Putting the Care into Caring

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If you ask any officer or non-commissioned officer if he is a caring leader, his answer will probably be a resounding "yes." We as leaders talk a lot about the concept of caring but, unfortunately, do not always pay the proper attention to the soldiers entrusted to our charge. Failing to care for subordinates is not restricted to any grade or rank; senior officers are often as guilty as junior NCOs.

I would like to offer a few suggestions on how to recognize the most common problems relating to improper care and how to improve the morale and welfare of units by more efficient caring practices. Many of these ideas may not be original, but they can serve as gentle reminders that if we provide for our soldiers, they will willingly perform to the utmost of their ability to accomplish the tasks we assign them. Some concepts may be a bit more controversial, but they are based on my observations during 18 years of commissioned service. The list is by no means all inclusive or in any order of priority.

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's well-known adage that the best form of welfare for the troops is first class training is as applicable today as it was when he offered it. Excellent training procedures reduce friendly casualties. Tough realistic training produces disciplined units that can absorb a solid punch and then deliver decisive results on the battlefield. Well disciplined units will not crack when confronted with superior firepower or numbers.

Consequently, small unit leaders must instill a spirit of combat discipline in their

units if they expect to survive in combat. The leaders who do this will bring their soldiers home when the fighting is over. As General Matthew Ridgway once stated, "Only through high training requirements, rigidly enforced, can low casualty rates be possible. Only well armed and equipped, adequately trained and efficiently led forces can expect victory in future combat." This is the essence of soldier care.

## COUNSELING

Inadequate counseling is another area that needs vast improvement. When was the last time you counseled a soldier to his face when you wrote his performance report? As a senior rater, do you take the time to discuss your rating profile with each officer or soldier? Do you advise soldiers of their promotion potential, opportunities for military and civilian schools, or what they need to do to meet unit standards? Unfortunately, the answer to most of these questions is, "Not as often as I should."

Nothing is more disturbing to soldiers, NCOs, and officers than the perception that their superiors care so little for them that they will not take the time to discuss duty performance. This applies to both positive and negative performance counseling. Leaders must make time to tell soldiers where he thinks they stand. There is nothing worse than receiving a negative efficiency report or a counseling statement when all along the soldier felt that he was performing to standard.

One final word on efficiency reports

is in order. As future field grade and general officers, first sergeants and command sergeants major, leaders should never fall into the pattern where they rationalize their failure to counsel subordinates on their reports. A soldier's efficiency report is the most important item in his official file. If you are making decisions that will inevitably affect a young soldier's or leader's career, then take the time to discuss your rating with him. Don't be "too busy" to counsel him. Call it professional courtesy if nothing else.

A third area that many leaders overlook is the reception of soldiers into a unit. It is not enough to have a good plan on paper or simply to assign sponsors to incoming personnel. Check up on the sponsors. Are they actively helping the soldiers and their families in the transitional process? Or did they merely pick up the soldiers at the airport and drop them at the orderly room? Are incoming soldiers given enough time to settle their families before being sent to the field? Does the chain of command actively assist soldiers in finding adequate housing? Remember that an incoming soldier's lasting impression of the unit is often based on how well he was received when he arrived.

As important as a soldier's reception into a unit is, so is his departure. Do we as leaders ensure that award recommendations are submitted in a timely fashion? Do we see that dedicated soldiers receive their good conduct medals, end-of-tour awards, and Army lapel pins in company formations in front of their contemporaries?

Too often, award recommendations are

made so late that a soldier receives his award after he leaves a command. Sometimes he gets it in the mail. Our soldiers deserve better than that. Let each soldier be recognized in front of his friends and comrades in arms. Give immediate gratification where it is warranted. Present marksmanship and skill qualification badges on the spot. Not only will this increase a soldier's pride in the unit, but it will also give him an incentive for better performance.

It is equally important to correct and instruct soldiers who are not meeting the standard. How frequently do junior officers and NCOs fail to make corrections on the spot for uniform violations, failure to render proper military courtesy, and the like? Sooner or later, someone will make the correction, but generally not until numerous leaders have failed to do it.

Periodic inspections also contribute to the well being of a unit. Why are some units more cohesive than others? Why do some commands routinely perform better in tactical and garrison environments than others? I believe you will find a strong command presence in the better performing units. The squad leaders check their men and equipment, the platoon sergeants and company commanders

check and track training performance, and so on.

Closely related to inspecting subordinates is teaching them how to perform at the next higher level of responsibility. The greatest contribution a leader makes to the Army is training the soldiers who will then train others to assume positions of increased responsibility. Commanders should train platoon leaders, and first sergeants should train platoon sergeants, to take their place on the battlefield. In fact, I judge the success of every leader on how well he does train his immediate subordinates.

Last, but certainly not least in importance, the most caring leaders I have observed are those who take time to talk to their soldiers. What is wrong with a platoon leader or company commander taking the last 15 minutes before the final formation on Friday to outline the next week's activities?

Today, the U.S. Army has the best trained, best equipped, and best educated soldiers in its history. These soldiers, if properly led, are capable of accomplishing the most demanding mission we as leaders can devise. They will perform better, however, if they know what to expect, and if their leaders keep them informed. In units where the corporals and

sergeants continually brief their soldiers, nobody fails to get the word.

There are certainly numerous other examples of ways to improve soldier care. Caring, as one of the Army's four major pillars, is as important as training, leading, and maintaining—perhaps more so—because it contributes heavily to the other three pillars. We must recognize that units in which soldiers feel their leaders demonstrate genuine care for their well being will perform better in training and in combat.

That is the challenge we as leaders face in the modern Army. It is not really different from the challenge all leaders have faced throughout the history of warfare. If leaders care for their soldiers and lead by example, the battle is half won before the first round is fired. Now is the time to put the care back into caring.

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## SWAP SHOP



### STAR CLUSTER HOLSTER

In a light infantry unit, the soldiers carry the LCE (complete with bayonet, AN/PRC 126, three ammunition pouches, and the like), rucksack, ammunition, water, and pyrotechnics. Besides adding weight, the pyrotechnics are bulky, and there is really no good place to carry them. Star clusters are the worst. If you put them in your cargo pocket, they don't fit right and tend to irritate your thigh if you move a long distance. The rucksack or buttpack are not a good solution either, because you can't get to them in a hurry when you need one.

While in my company arms room, I noticed a group of cases for the bipod legs that automatic riflemen carried be-

fore the M249 SAW became part of the inventory. According to my unit armorer, he had turned in the bipod legs but the supply system did not want the cases.

I took these cases and tested them with a star cluster, and the experiment was a success. This "holster" takes up only one-and-a-half or two inches on the LCE and allows easy access to the cluster. I was able to carry two or three on my LCE and one or two clipped to my rucksack.

The holsters are also a good place to carry acetate overlays or several chemical lights.

The stock number for this item is 1005-00-992-6676.

*(Submitted by Lieutenant John E. Hodge, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry, in Korea.)*